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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TASHKENT 000002

SIPDIS SIPDIS  
DEPT FOR SCA/CEN  
AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO USOFFICE ALMATY  
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PASS TO AMCONSUL HYDERABAD  
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [SOCI](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [UZ](#)  
SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: STAFFDEL DISCUSSES COUNTERTERRORISM WITH MVD

REF: a) TASHKENT 777, b) TASHKENT 1288, c) IIR 6 955 0062 09  
d) TASHKENT 878, e) TASHKENT 20, f) TASHKENT 1266

CLASSIFIED BY: Steven Prohaska, Second Secretary, P/E Office; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

[11.](#) (C) Summary: On December 15, House Foreign Affairs Committee staffers and Emboffs discussed counterterrorism with several officials from Uzbekistan's Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD). The MVD officials held that Uzbekistan is stable and a system of information-sharing with other ministries and other states is in place, but perceived other Central Asian states as lagging behind Uzbekistan in counterterrorism legislation. The MVD also believed that it was difficult for extremist ideas to survive in an environment like Uzbekistan, and that certain extremist ideas were largely incompatible with the Uzbek mentality. Although many of the MVD's remarks about Uzbekistan's counterterrorism efforts were vague, their comments about the role that the mahalla (or neighborhood) plays in detecting and countering Islamic extremism in Uzbekistan were notable. Religious extremist groups are certainly less publicly active in the country now than was the case ten years ago, and the GOU's crackdown on such groups over the years as well as its efforts to promote a moderate form of Islam among the populace appear to have contributed to this. Nevertheless, the GOU's measures remain imperfect and abuse occurs. End summary.

#### Information-Sharing and International Cooperation

[12.](#) (C) On December 15, House Foreign Affairs Committee staffers Brent Woolfork and Taylor Morgan and Emboffs discussed counterterrorism with officials from Uzbekistan's Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), including First Deputy Head of the Counterterrorism Department Nurmuhamedov, Counterterrorism Department Section Chief Petrochenko, Counterterrorism Department Deputy Head Haydarov, and International Relations, Organizational and Inspectorial Department Senior Inspector Agzamkhojaev.

[13.](#) (C) Petrochenko said that the MVD considers Uzbekistan to be stable. While terrorist acts cannot always be predicted in any country, at the moment, there is no obvious terrorist threat in Uzbekistan. In response to a question about the extent of MVD's counterterrorism information-sharing with other ministries and countries, Haydarov said that it's hard to name any that Uzbekistan does not cooperate with. The MVD interacts in particular with the National Security Service on these matters. "We have a system of information-sharing in place," he continued. "If we know there's a threat to Tajikistan, for instance, of course we'll tell them." Petrochenko elaborated that Uzbekistan shares information on counterterrorism and counterextremism within the framework of various international treaties and organizations including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Uzbekistan also participates in international fora and conferences, and Petrochenko cited one that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe had sponsored a month earlier.

[14.](#) (C) Petrochenko noted that one of the first documents Uzbekistan adopted after independence was a law on combating terrorism and was proud of the "strong legislative basis" that guides Uzbekistan's efforts in this regard. He complained that Uzbekistan's other Central Asian neighbors do not have similar legislation in place.

#### Prevalence of Islamic Extremism, Efforts to Combat It

[15.](#) (C) In response to a question about the prevalence of Islamic extremism in Uzbekistan, Petrochenko replied that this was much more of a problem ten years ago. Uzbekistan, however, addressed the problem by pursuing a set of preventive measures and punishments. After the meeting, and away from the office, Agzamkhodjaev elaborated on Petrochenko's very general comments by describing some of the measures Uzbekistan has pursued to counter the threat of extremism. Uzbekistan also uses mahalla

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(neighborhood) committees, he said, and thanks to this "community policing," authorities become aware very quickly if there are any indications of extremism arising in a mahalla. "It is hard for extremist ideas to survive in an environment like Uzbekistan because of the mahallas," he said. "Even if a baby goes hungry for a little while when its parents are away, the other members of the mahalla will know it quickly." Agzamkhodjaev said that community policing forms the basis for a strong state. Furthermore, old wise men in a mahalla promote a moderate form of Islam among the populace, and the mahallas also focus on certain groups such as women and youth. (Note: Mahallas are headed by "aksakals," or "white beards," who receive government salaries and serve two and a half year terms. End note.) Agzamkhodjaev believed that certain Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) ideas are incompatible with the Uzbek mentality, and this is an additional factor that impedes the spread

of extremism among the populace. "According to HT, a son must separate from parents who do not also subscribe to HT. Such ideas are not well-received in the populace," he said.

Comment:

16. (C) The MVD's comments about the declining support in Uzbekistan for Islamic extremism are consistent with views we have heard from other sources, including human rights activists and Imams in the Ferghana Valley, the traditional hotspot for religious extremism in Central Asia (ref A). Moreover, while individuals continue to be charged with membership in religious extremist groups and receive long prison sentences, the total number of such cases appears to have declined in the past year. Nevertheless, we cannot confirm the MVD's information, and state-controlled media also has recently reported on the Islamic Jihad Group actively recruiting inside of Uzbekistan (reftel B). Religious extremist groups, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, are certainly less publicly active in the country now than was the case ten years ago. This is partially the result of a large-scale government crackdown on such groups that has been carried out since the late 1990s. Many of their members may already be in prison, while others have likely been driven deeper underground or to other areas, such as the regions of the Ferghana Valley in Kyrgyzstan (reftel C). The government also appears to have been more successful in recent years in promoting a tolerant, moderate form of Islam, which may have further sapped support for extremism (refrels B and D). Especially interesting from the MVD meeting was the additional detail about the role that the mahalla--a social institution that we suspected may serve partly as an instrument of state control--plays in Uzbekistan's efforts to counter extremism among the populace. We have long reported that mahalla leaders use informers (called "posbons") to keep tabs on community members. The reliability of the information provided by such informers may be suspect, however, especially considering that some of the individuals who have been imprisoned on religious extremist charges over the years have had at most only tenuous links to groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir. Some of these individuals--who previously may not have harbored such sentiments--could become radicalized after being locked up with hardcore extremists. One of our concerns is that Uzbek prisons are becoming incubators for extremism, and we believe the GOU is increasingly concerned about this though it has not settled on a policy to address it other than through state controls. We remain concerned that individuals charged with religious extremism are frequently denied due process of law and are abused.

17. (C) Despite the MVD's claim that counterterrorism information-sharing is ongoing with neighboring states, it is difficult to judge the extent to which this actually takes place--and longstanding prickly relations with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan's near-silence in response to U.S. counterterrorism demarches over the past year would seem to cast doubt on Uzbekistan actively sharing counterterrorism information with many other states. While the MVD officials provided some additional information that complements what they told Poloff during his first meeting with them in January, their comments on the whole continued to avoid specific details about Uzbekistan's counterterrorism efforts.

NORLAND

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